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Identical letters dated 30 October 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the forty-fourth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/902).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates the concerns that it raised in its previous responses to reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the aforementioned Security Council resolutions. It stresses that the current report, despite some improvements, is still in dire need of greater clarity, transparency and professionalism in order to be credible. It also stresses that in preparing their reports, the authors should exhibit greater respect for the provisions of the above-mentioned United Nations resolutions, and in particular the principles of full commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and the provision of humanitarian support within Syria without politicization or selectivity.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic also draws attention to the following:

The current report, like its predecessors, suffers from the serious defect that its authors have relied on politicized sources that have no credibility, while they ignore not only reliable Government sources, but even reports of United Nations representatives operating in Syria that acknowledge the efforts of the Syrian Government, its cooperation on humanitarian relief and the facilities that it provides for their work.

Despite showing a willingness to turn over a new leaf in cooperation with the Syrian Government and move away from certain practices of their predecessors, the authors of the report are still using it as a periodic opportunity to relay unfounded claims and allegations with no basis in fact in order to put a bad face on the Syrian Government's efforts in the service of the political objectives of certain States that have a negative influence within the United Nations. Among those objectives is promoting the idea that there is an "urgent need" to extend the mandate of resolution 2165 (2014). That is evident, just by way of example, from paragraph 7 in Box 1, paragraph 20 and paragraph 41, and from the inclusion of an annex that

contains undocumented accusations and turns a blind eye to the crimes of terrorist organizations with various names and loyalties.

The Syrian Government rejects the Secretariat's continued promotion of cross-border assistance, and reiterates that such assistance is ineffective, given that most of it falls into the hands of armed terrorist groups deployed in the targeted areas. That is a fact acknowledged by both the United Nations itself and the States seeking to extend resolution 2165 (2014). The Syrian Government reiterates that the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot verify that such assistance is making its way into the hands of deserving civilian recipients. We also remind you that the Bab al-Hawa, Bab al-Salamah and Ramtha crossings are entry points for arms, materiel and ammunition being smuggled to armed terrorist groups in Syria. The Government strongly rejects the authors' continued bias in favour of Turkey and Jordan when discussing the delivery of cross-border assistance. It also categorically condemns and rejects any use of the Fish Khabur crossing — which is not mentioned in resolution 2165 (2014) — by either the United Nations or international non-governmental organizations supported by the United Nations, which are operating illegally in certain parts of Syria. The Syrian Government reiterates that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent stands ready to monitor the delivery of humanitarian assistance to its intended recipients, but the Secretariat has in the past rejected that proposal.

The Syrian Government insists that the authors of the report should tell Member States the truth about significant recent progress in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to deserving recipients following the liberation by the Syrian Government and its allies of most of Syrian territory from the abomination of terrorism. The Syrian Government objects to the characterization by the authors of the report of operations mentioned in paragraph 7 as "overtaking" areas, when the correct characterization would have been "liberating from terrorism". The Syrian Government notes that in the month of September, in keeping with its commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to those in need, it agreed to the establishment of a trilateral mechanism for cooperation among the Syrian Government, the Russian side and the United Nations to coordinate and enhance the delivery of humanitarian access. That mechanism has already achieved positive results over the recent period.

The Syrian Government categorically rejects the continued bias shown by the authors of the report towards the so-called "international coalition" and its members, which is evident from the report's attempts to gloss over massacres and acts of destruction and sabotage committed by that coalition and its allied militias, their use of internationally prohibited weapons against civilians in Syria, and other violations of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Syrian Government again calls for the immediate dissolution of that illegitimate coalition and an end to its crimes against Syrians.

It is unfortunate that notwithstanding calls from the Syrian Government and members of the Security Council, the authors of the report have failed to fulfil their responsibility to give the global public a true picture of the economic and humanitarian suffering caused by the unilateral coercive economic measures imposed on Syria by the United States of America, the European Union and other States. Those measures are having numerous negative impacts. They have even affected the activities of United Nations agencies and foreign non-governmental organizations operating in Syria and brought about the suspension of projects vital to responding to the needs of Syrians.

The Syrian Government stresses that United Nations officials operating in Syria should not have anything to do with any separatist entities, illegal "local councils", or unlicensed charitable associations, especially given that such entities are more often than not attached to terrorist groups active in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Syrian Government stands by its position rejecting continued efforts by the authors of the report to legitimize the terrorist groups deployed in Syria by calling them by illegitimate names, such as "non-State armed opposition" or "moderate armed opposition". In particular, it rejects the report's reference to "non-State opposition groups" in the Jawbar and Yarmuk areas, even though everyone knows that the groups deployed in those areas are in fact the Nusrah Front and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organizations. The Syrian Government believes that authors of the report should be held accountable for their irresponsible approach, which is of a piece with attempts by terrorist groups such as the terrorist "Levant Liberation Organization" — that is, the Nusrah Front — to legitimize their presence in certain parts of Syria by calling their headquarters and branches "charitable associations".

The Syrian Government once again condemns the fact that the authors of the report have ignored the blatant Turkish intervention in Syria and occupation of part of its territory, and once again calls on the Security Council to fulfil its responsibilities by putting an end to that occupation.

The Syrian Government regrets that the authors of the report fail to acknowledge that donors are not living up to their financial commitments, and are setting politicized conditions for financing international organizations operating in Syria, which is one of the main things obstructing the humanitarian response to Syrians in need and blocking support for Government plans aimed at rehabilitating infrastructure and returning refugees to their regions once security and stability are restored.

The Syrian Government notes that statistics from United Nations offices in Syria confirm that the Syrian Government granted 955 entry and residence visas to United Nations staff during the period between January and September 2017, or 86 per cent out of the 1,109 applications received. It rejected only 41 (that figure should be 29 according to Syrian Government statistics). The remaining applications are being processed. Meanwhile, the Syrian Government has granted hundreds of visas to the International Committee of the Red Cross and representatives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies from countries around the world, as well as to numerous representatives of international non-governmental organizations and humanitarian bodies from various different States.

In keeping with its belief that civic associations have a role to play in humanitarian work as a national partner, and with a view to enhancing such work, the Syrian Government has set up a mechanism to develop cooperation between civic associations and international organizations operating in Syria that will allow the United Nations and its agencies to work together with all duly licensed civic associations and charitable institutions without being limited to associations entered on the list used previously.

With regard to the number of international non-governmental organizations approved to operate in the Syrian Arab Republic, the correct figure is 27 such organizations to date, not 23 as appearing in the report. Applications submitted by other organizations for permission to operate in Syria are under consideration.

The Syrian Government reiterates its stated position regarding the International Criminal Court and the calls that have been made to refer the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to that Court, and stresses that the Court is not competent to address the situation in Syria. Moreover, the Court has lost all credibility and has been transformed into a political tool that is used by certain parties to attack specific States for sordid political ends that have nothing to do with the requirements of justice. The Syrian Government also reiterates what it stated in its letter to the Secretary-General regarding the serious legal flaws in the resolution on the "international investigation and accountability mechanism" (A/71/799).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its long-standing position that the crisis in Syria requires a political solution based on intra-Syrian dialogue under Syrian leadership without foreign intervention and without preconditions. We remind the Secretariat that the success of the political process and any significant improvement in the humanitarian situation will depend, above all, on creating a climate conducive to a serious and non-politicized international and regional commitment to fighting terrorism and on an immediate end to the unilateral coercive economic measures being imposed on the Syrian people. The Syrian Government stresses that it has played a constructive role in the success of the Astana and Geneva meetings.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic once again calls on the Security Council to prevail on the States that support and finance armed terrorist groups to refrain from so doing, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism and the financing thereof, in particular resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015). Compliance with and enforcement of those resolutions is the key to resolving the situation in Syria and delivering unprecedented humanitarian assistance to those in need in Syria.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mounzer **Mounzer**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.